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SUPERVISOR RIDLEY-THOMAS SUPPORTS PROPOSAL TO AUDIT COUNTY'S CHILD PROTECTION SAFETY NET TO INCLUDE A REVIEW OF FAMILY CHILDREN'S INDEX

LOS ANGELES -- Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas today joined the Board in its decision to retain an independent firm to audit the efficacy of the recently-implemented safety enhancements by the County's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), but urged that the audit include an evaluation of the department's use of computer technology, specifically the Family Children's Index (FCI).

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas' call for an independent audit of FCI builds on his previous efforts to evaluate the system, which began with his August 18, 2009 motion to review the system.

Designed primarily for information sharing, the current FCI system allows County departments to exchange information regarding children's services, health services, law enforcement, mental health services, probation, schools, and social service agencies. The system also informs DCFS case workers that a record exists, providing the name of a contact person -- who often is not able to be reached.

Since DCFS was subjected to a management audit in 1998, technology has been central to the Department's efforts to enhance children's safety. Two key initiatives were the 2005 introduction of the FCI and the addition of 2,400 tablet computers in 2007.

While some contend that the systems and equipment are working, others assert the systems are failing to perform as they were intended.

“An independent audit would provide the kind of thorough assessment necessary to ensure the County’s substantial investments in technology are paying off, and whether improvements or overhauls are necessary,” the Supervisor said.

“Social workers and others responsible for the well-being of children should have every piece of available information to get our children out of dangerous situations before it’s too late.”

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas offered the amendment to the proposal to audit safety enhancements, introduced by Supervisors Michael Antonivich and Don Knabe.

At the April 27, 2010 Board meeting, he urged the Board to explore additional information sharing initiatives to track the health and welfare of children under the protection of DCFS. His request was in response to the County CEO’s analysis of the FCI Replacement System.

The CEO was reporting back to the Board on Supervisor Ridley-Thomas’ initial August 18, 2009 request to research new technology and best practices to improve how various County agencies share potentially life-saving information.

By approving today’s request for an audit of DCFS’ safety enhancements and information sharing technology, the Board instructed the CEO to ensure that the independent firm closely consults with County Counsel to guarantee that its audit is in compliance with all applicable confidentiality laws.

The independent auditing firm will also work closely with the County’s juvenile court system in order to understand the complexity of its decisions and operations.

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